

## Gardening After a Colles Fracture



**P**erhaps you fell on the ice in January and suffered a Colles fracture, then wore a cast for two months. Can you resume gardening this spring, and should you protect your wrist if you do?

A Colles fracture is the most common of several conditions that might be called a “**broken wrist.**” Named for Irish surgeon and anatomist Dr. Abraham Colles, who first described it in 1814, the fracture is located

at the distal end (wrist) of the radius, the larger of two bones that stretch from elbow to wrist. A Colles fracture usually occurs when a person uses the hands to stop the body from lurching forward in a car crash, or slips on the ice and instinctively uses the hands to break the fall and keep his or her face from hitting the ground.

Physical therapy is one component of recovery from a Colles fracture. We can prescribe exercises to improve your circulation, reduce swelling and ease discomfort, and enable you to regain movement, strength, flexibility, coordination and function of your wrist. We can also recommend ways to prevent future injuries.

You should be able to begin gardening in the spring if you meet the following conditions:

- **you have been faithfully performing both range-of-motion and strengthening exercises since your cast was removed;**
- **your wrist feels close to normal;** and
- **you are comfortable wearing a wrist splint to help limit motion and prevent strain when you spade or shovel.**

During your first forays into the garden after physical therapy, you may experience some stiffness and even pain. Such feelings are normal and may last a year or two past the date of the fracture. If you are older than 50 years of age, have osteoarthritis or received the fracture in a high-impact mishap such as a car crash, some stiffness might linger permanently.

While most people regain use of their wrist and hand after a Colles fracture, exercise and physical therapy can help you recover more quickly and more fully. Seeing us for an individualized treatment plan and performing your exercises regularly will get you back to gardening comfortably very soon.